# G. L. BLACKSTONE & ASSOCIATES LLC

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| **M E M O R A N D U M  {D R A F T}** |

**TO:** **Real Estate Committee Co-Chairs Dennis Robertson & Chuck Lesnick**

**FROM:** **G. Lamont Blackstone**

**DATE:** **December 17, 2007**

**RE:** **Supplement to TIF Feasibility Study Completeness Review Draft**

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This report is a supplement to the December 7, 2007 draft memorandum outlining my review of the TIF feasibility study submitted by the developers of the SFC Project planned for downtown Yonkers. The comments of this supplement are exclusively focused on the Blight Findings section of the December 7, 2007 memorandum. The blight findings comments are a response to the blight study conducted by the developers as required by Section 970 of the Municipal Redevelopment Law. AKRF assisted me in the preparation of this review of the developers' blight study. Accordingly, AKRF's comments are included below as Exhibit A to this memorandum.

On page 2 of my December 7th memo, the last sentence in Comment #1 of the Blight Findings section is now deleted. Please refer to the last sentence in Comment #5 in Exhibit A of this memorandum for the appropriate instruction regarding the Getty Square Urban Renewal Plan and the Riverview Urban Renewal Plan.

<u>**EXHIBIT A – AKRF COMMENTS ON SFC PROJECT BLIGHT STUDY**</u>


**Appendix 1F, TIF Feasibility Study and Preliminary Plan for Municipal Development**


The following presents a review of the TIF feasibility study, and recommendations pertaining to the blight study. Suggestions include: a reorganized introduction/executive summary; referencing the Municipal Redevelopment Law throughout the text; and evaluating other criteria for blight.

1.      A REORGANIZED INTRODUCTION

A reorganized introduction would clarify the purpose and approach of the analysis. Possibly add sentence 1 from the first full paragraph on page II-2 and paragraph 2 on page II-2 to the first paragraph of the Blight Study section.

After this section, there should be a methodology section, which would include:
- Boundaries of the project site
- Background on the Municipal Redevelopment Law
- Sources used in this analysis
- Discussion about the field inspections: Who conducted the field surveys? What experience does the company have evaluating properties? What criteria was used to determine if the lot was in good, fair, or poor condition? Were these exterior-only evaluations, or were interiors also evaluated?
- Discuss Table II-2 and Table II-3.

Note: Using headers before sections could be helpful. For example, before paragraph 2 on page 1, there should be a header "About the Project." Before paragraph 3 on page 1, there should be a header "Municipal Redevelopment Law."


2.      REFERENCING THE MUNICIPAL REDEVELOPMENT LAW THROUGHOUT THE TEXT

The document states "The conclusion of this study is that the Study Area is a blighted area within the meaning of the Municipal Redevelopment Law." Thus, the document should point out the following:
- "a predominance of building and structures which are deteriorated or unfit or unsafe for use or occupancy;"
- "or a predominance of economically unproductive lands, buildings or structures, the redevelopment of which is needed to prevent further deterioration which would jeopardize the economic well being of the people."
- A concentration of poor properties, which is defined as "structurally unsound, such as sagging roof beams; unstable or settled, uneven foundation; broken glass, or doors, appearance of neglect," would be an indication of blight as defined by the Municipal Redevelopment Law. Based on Table II-4, 16 percent of buildings in the study area fit into this category. The text does not reference the number of poor properties, but discusses the concentration of fair and poor properties in the study area: "As shown in Table II-4, "Summary of Building Conditions," 100 (43%) are in "fair" or "poor"

condition, exhibiting disrepair and neglect, or lacking structurally sound supporting roofs, walls, or exhibiting significant visual deficits." To provide for a more precise reporting of overall building conditions, the discussion about fair properties should be separated from poor properties as follows: "As shown in Table II-4, "Summary of Building Conditions," 64 (28%) are in "fair" or poor condition, exhibiting disrepair and neglect; and 36 (16%) are in poor condition, lacking structurally sound supporting roofs, walls, or exhibiting significant visual deficits."

- The discussion about vacant and underutilized buildings is on page 5. Please provide a more specific definition for vacancy. Was a building considered vacant if the entire building was considered vacant? Or was it considered vacant if at least a certain percentage was considered vacant? If vacant and underutilized buildings are determined to be unproductive, it should be noted that unproductive buildings are an indication of blight under the Municipal Redevelopment Law.
- The discussion about vacant buildings is at the end of section 3 on page 5 and the discussion about vacant and underutilized properties is in section 5 on page 6. Because the Municipal Redevelopment Law discusses these together in one criterion, it would be useful to discuss them one after another. After both sections, there should be a summarizing sentence that compares area conditions to the definitions of blight indicators under the Municipal Redevelopment Law.

3.      INCLUDING OTHER CRITERIA FOR BLIGHT

While not specifically stated under the Municipal Redevelopment Law, there are several other factors that can be considered in assessing the potential for blighted conditions in an area. These factors include the following:

- Crime – Are conditions in the study area unsafe?
- Ownership – Are there multiple owners such that property assemblage would be difficult?
- Discussion about zoning and a comparison of existing square feet of built space with the built square feet that is allowed under zoning.
- Building code violations (if this information is available).

4.      OTHER SUGGESTIONS
- The reporting of physical conditions would be clearer if the photographs were throughout the text.
- Provide comparisons to Yonkers and Westchester County. For example, Table II-1 shows that 26 percent of land in the study area is vacant land. How does this compare to Yonkers or Westchester County?
5.      In the third paragraph on page 2, provide more detail about the Getty Square Urban Renewal Plan and the Riverview Urban Renewal Plan. Further information could be included such as: the Riverview Urban Renewal Area overlaps with the majority of the western portion of the study area, and the Getty Square Urban Renewal Area overlaps with the majority of the eastern portion of the study area. Also. Please indicate the applicability or effect, if any, of previous blight determinations for purposes of this study.

6. "Existing Conditions," page 2: More detail should be provided in the existing land use discussion. Please provide references to the numbers in Table II-1.

7. It would be useful to provide the definition for "underutilized building" in the above paragraph.

8. "Building Conditions," page 5

   - This section should reference photographs throughout the text.
   - The second sentence on this page states "…100 (43%) are in "fair" or "poor" condition, exhibiting disrepair and neglect, or lacking structurally sound supporting roofs, walls, or exhibiting significant visual deficits." See comment on page 1.
   - In the document, the terminology for building condition is good, fair, or poor. Exhibit II-4 uses sound, fair, or poor. Terminology should be consistent. Also, order of conditions in the legend should be consistent and should be listed in a descending order of condition: good, fair, poor (not fair, poor, sound).
   - Table II-4: In the Source line, indicate when the field survey was conducted.
   - It would be useful to include three different maps
       - a property condition map;
       - a map that shows vacancy and underutilization;
       - a composite map showing substandard conditions in the Study Area, including properties in poor condition, vacancy, and underutilization. (This map does not need to show Fair and Good conditions.)

9. "Lot and Yard Conditions," page 6

   - Since Section 5 discusses vacant and underutilized properties, the discussion about vacant lots should be removed from the "lot and yard conditions" section.

10. "Vacant and Underutilized Properties," page 6

   - The fourth sentence states "Taken together, vacant and underutilized tax lots, and lots with underutilized (partially vacant) buildings total approximately 33 acres, or 42 percent of the study area land." 33 acres does not match the data in Table II-5 and Table II-6.
       - Table II-5 shows that there are 30.2 acres with vacant and underutilized lots
       - Table II-6 shows that there are 8.54 acres with underutilized buildings
   - This section discusses the data in Table II-5. However, there is no discussion about the "Other" category. This paragraph should discuss what is included in this category.
   - The last sentence of this paragraph is "When coupled with the buildings in fair and poor condition, the need for redevelopment in the Study Area is evident (See Table II-6, "Summary of Blight and Blighting Factors")." Data from this table should be discussed in the conclusions section.
   - The total acreage in Table II-6 (76.48) does not match the acreage numbers presented in Table II-1 (75.75)
   - There is an inconsistency between Table II-6 and Table II-5, under "Other" (Table II-6) the percent of total is cited as 45%," whereas the percentage given in Table II-5 is 4%. This needs clarification.

- In Table II-6, vacant lots, underutilized lots, and other are all in the "poor condition" category. It should be explained in the text why all of these were classified as poor.

11. "Public Improvements," page 7

- Discussion about sidewalks and curbs could be strengthened by referencing the photographs.
- The discussion about the roads should be separated from the discussion about the sidewalks. What criterion was used to determine that the roads are in fair condition?

12. Photographs

- General comment: Photo captions should be descriptive, including the address of each property.
- Page 1: The caption states "The area known as "Chicken Island," in the Center of the Study Area, is deteriorated and has been an underutilized municipal parking lot in recent decades." The caption should state how it is deteriorated. Is it covered with potholes? Is there insufficient lighting at night, making it unsafe for people parking in the lot?
- Page 2: The caption states "The single-story, shuttered building and fenced parking lot at the intersection of Buena Vista Avenue and Hudson Street is poorly maintained. In addition, the sidewalk and curbs are in poor condition." The caption should specify what makes this building, its curbs, and its sidewalk in poor condition.
- Page 3: The caption states "Two wood frame residents remain on Hawthorne Avenue, with a shared garage in poor condition." Caption should describe why the garage is in poor condition.
- The caption for the bottom photo states "Next door is a residence showing some deterioration." The caption should identify what on the house is deteriorated.
- Page 5: In the bottom photograph, the sidewalk is cracked and in poor condition. The caption should be revised to include the cracked sidewalk.
- Page 8: The caption states "The surrounding properties at the intersection of John and James Streets are somewhat neglected." State in the caption how they are neglected.
- Page 10: The caption states "Guion Street lacks adequate sidewalks, and adjacent properties appear to be neglected." Please state in the caption how the sidewalks are inadequate, and why the adjacent properties are considered neglected.
- Page 11: Caption states "Properties on Morgan Street show signs of blight and deterioration." Caption should state what is deteriorated on these sites.
- Page 13: The caption should indicate the poor conditions in the photograph. In the top photograph, is the sidewalk cracked and unsafe for pedestrians? Is the lot overgrown with weeds and not adequately maintained?
- Page 14: The caption states "…surrounding sidewalks and curbs are in poor condition." State why the sidewalks are in poor condition.

- Page 16: Caption for the top photograph states "Buildings fronting on Nepperhan Avenue, near the intersection with Elm Street, show serious problems." Caption needs to be more descriptive. What are the serious problems?

- Page 16: Caption for the bottom photograph states "Small shuttered buildings on Riverdale Avenue are vacant and deteriorated." Caption should state how the buildings are deteriorated.